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C O N F I D E N T I A L DUSHANBE 001793

SIPDIS

NSC FOR MERKEL

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SUBJECT: EU SWIMMING IN THE SAME MOLASSES IN TAJIKISTAN

REF: A) DUSHANBE 1729 B) DUSHANBE 1762 C) DUSHANBE 1766

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard Hoagland, Ambassador, US Embassy

Dushanbe, State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) In a meeting with the European Commission, Muzaffar Isakov, Director of the Aid Coordination Unit of the President of Tajikistan, suggested that while EC experts and consultants would continue to receive visas for Tajikistan, international NGO workers were less welcome. Barbara Plinkert, Chargé d'affaires for the European Commission briefed Poloff November 6 about her meeting to discuss EC-financed NGO problems obtaining and renewing visas, and a new \$7 fee for invitation letters from the MFA's Consular Department. Isakov suggested the Europeans shift their support from humanitarian assistance to economic development. (The same message we heard from Foreign Minister Nazarov reported reftel B.) Isakov was pleased with the technical assistance on certain issues, but saw little need for continued civil society projects. He also asked Plinkert to provide more information, possibly quarterly reports, about the organizations and projects they were funding.

¶2. (C) Plinkert reminded Isakov that all personnel working on EC-financed projects are entitled to visas under an assistance agreement signed in 1994. Article 10 specifically stipulates that "The Government shall grant personnel taking part in services contracts financed by the (European) Community, and members of their family, as defined in Article 9, multiple entry visas and appropriate visa extensions to be issued in the republic of Tajikistan."

¶3. (C) In a November 3 letter signed by Adrian van der Meer, Head of Delegation, the Europeans firmly reminded the Tajiks of the conditions. "Up to now the Delegation of the European Commission to Tajikistan has assisted the Government in applying for visa (sic) for international experts and consultants. With the new fees imposed and delays experienced, this arrangement appears no longer practicable. In order to avoid further misunderstandings I would request that, in future, the Government take full responsibility for the issuance of visa in compliance with Article 10."

¶4. (C) Plinkert suggested that since the EC and USG fund similar projects, and often partner with the same NGOs, the missions in Tajikistan coordinate their approach to the growing visa difficulties. She accepted Poloff's invitation to an NGO roundtable later in the month, possibly with Tajik officials, to better understand the changing climate and develop a strategy to work with the Tajiks to ensure established projects can continue.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: In an unusually coordinated effort, the Tajiks are sending a strong message to the donor community: we want your money, but not your NGOs. As the goalposts continue to shift, Post will work with other donors and NGOs to comply with the system so as to continue the critical democracy and civil society work.

¶6. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: Post has also heard rumors that the Head of the Consular Department, Bakhrom Kholnozarov, believed to be a Rahmonov relative, has been profiting greatly from his position from additional fees and bribes (Reftel c). This is the first we've heard of a new fee for invitation letters, but the motives may be less anti-NGO and more old-fashioned corruption. END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND

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